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Reprint

EXTRAPOLATION:  
A SCIENCE-FICTION  
NEWSLETTER

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Wooster, Ohio

The Newsletter of the Conference on Science-Fiction of the MLA is published twice a year in the Department of English at The College of Wooster. All correspondence should be addressed to the editor.



FROM THE LAUNCHING PAD

As some of you will remember, last December at the MLA meeting the Conference voted to attempt to gain permanent status as a Discussion Group, electing Scott C. Osborn of Mississippi State University as next year's chairman.

Scott has written to me, outlining the procedure to be undertaken. He says that each person supporting the move should write an individual letter addressed to the Executive Secretary of MLA, but they should be mailed to Scott so that he, as chairman, can send them in together when he has collected 45. Scott's address is as follows:

Box 69  
Mississippi State University  
State College, Mississippi.

I have reproduced below a sample letter that Scott wrote as a pilot model. "No two letters," he emphasizes, "should be alike. Each person who writes in support of the request must write his own letter in his own way." He is, however, sending a copy of their letter to each person he writes to.

18 February 1963

Mr. John Fisher  
Executive Secretary  
The Modern Language Association of America  
4-6 Washington Place East  
New York 3, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Fisher:

I am writing in support of the application of those who have conducted a Science-Fiction Conference annually beginning in 1958 for elevation to permanent status as a Discussion Group, with regularly elected officers and a program of papers.

During its five continuous years the Science-Fiction Conference has amply demonstrated its viability and its scholarly seriousness. Discussions have been lively and significant, and the Conference has sponsored a quarterly periodical, Extrapolation, published at Wooster College, Ohio, in which have appeared valuable bibliographies and penetrating analyses of modern science fiction.

The creation of this new Discussion Group, probably a General Topics Group, might at first glance seem to overlap the domain of an already established Group, General Topics 7, Literature and Science. As a matter of truth, however, the interests of GT 7 and of the proposed Science Fiction Group do not seem to touch at any point, if the programs of the past

several years should be called to witness.

Two great differences are at once apparent. First, GT 7 deals with the effects of early modern science upon the thinking and writing of major literary figures; the Science-Fiction Conference is interested in nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction which studies the impact of recent developments in the physical and behavioral sciences upon individuals and groups in our time. Second, GT 7 seems seldom to come past the seventeenth century in its studies; the Science-Fiction Conference is interested in work of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It seems to me that the establishment of a Group to give serious study to modern science fiction both as a genre in itself and as an increasingly important element in general literature of our time is completely justified.

Sincerely yours,

Scott C. Osborn

While the status of Discussion Group probably cannot be gained until next year because of the procedure involved, now is the time to write your letter. Address it to John Fisher, Executive Secretary, but mail it to Scott.

A second matter of interest is the science-fiction collection held by The Houghton Library. Mark Hillegas will have a detailed description of it for the December issue of Extrapolation; for now, M. J. Faigel, curator of the Harvard collection, has written that "the catalogue now has over 2700 cards." The collection is not recorded in the public catalogue in order to preserve it for present and future scholarly work.

T. D. C.

# THE ARTISTIC PROBLEM: SCIENCE FICTION AS ROMANCE<sup>1</sup>

Lionel Stevenson

I must begin by insisting in the most emphatic possible terms that I am not an authority in the field of science fiction. My reading in this area has been entirely desultory, and I stand in proper awe of the experts whom I have heard speak at previous sessions of this group. But I am keenly interested in observing how any particular sub-species of prose fiction relates itself to the total historical and aesthetic context of the English novel; and it is my impression that from this point of view science fiction has been unduly neglected.

The general histories of the novel barely mention it; even the encyclopedic Ernest A. Baker allows it only a few sentences in his chapter entitled "Satirists and Utopians, Revolutionaries and Evolutionaries," and this heading is revelatory of the directions from which it is usually approached. Even the specialized treatises on science fiction seem to deal with any other consideration rather than the artistic. It has been discussed in relation to utopian visions and dystopian warnings, to social protest and political satire, and of course it has been analysed in relation to the accuracy or plausibility of its scientific data. These are all highly significant topics, but their significance is not essentially relevant to the artistic merit of a work of literature. The total status of science fiction can be greatly enhanced if it can be shown to possess this sort of merit in addition to its other, extraneous, qualities.

To begin with, it is plain that the real prominence of science fiction as a literary genre began about seventy years ago. This fact is likely to be passed over on the obvious ground that it coincided with an intensified public interest in the physical sciences, their inclusion in school and college curricula, and the acceleration of inventions that affected everyone's daily life. But these influences might more probably have eventuated in an increase in popular publications of a factual, informative nature, rather than in the development of a fresh type of creative literature.

In order to estimate the innovation in proper perspective, a glance must be directed toward its historical background. As with most (perhaps all) new genres, it was produced by several separate currents which eventually flowed together when external forces brought their channels to a point of conflict.

So far as literary eminence is concerned, the most distinguished pre-

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1. This paper served as Professor Stevenson's point of departure when he led the discussion at the December, 1962, Conference in Washington.

cursors are those that belong to a genre not properly to be considered in the category of the novel at all. Plato's Republic, Bacon's New Atlantis, Campanella's City of the Sun, even Gulliver's Travels and Erewhon, use some of the superficial devices of fiction merely to render the author's social theories or his satirical grievances palatable to a wider public. A modicum of invented action, dialogue, and description of settings lent vividness to material that would otherwise be tediously abstract. It is doubtful whether anyone has enjoyed these books primarily for the suspense of the narrative or the sense of identification with the characters. One is not apt to feel painful tension as to whether Lemuel Gulliver will escape from Laputa, or to weep in sympathy for the dilemma of the visitor to Erewhon in his affection for Arowhena Nosnibor and his dislike for her sister Zulora.

Exactly opposite conditions apply to the second of the separate literary antecedents--the tale of terror. For addicts of Gothic romance, the agonies of suspense and the tears of pity were supremely important, and intellectual concepts were conspicuous by their absence. The effects of fear and sympathy were immensely heightened by the inclusion of supernatural elements, whether literal, as in The Castle of Otranto, or illusory, as in The Mysteries of Udolpho. But these responses depended directly upon the reader's innate superstition, and the rationalism of the nineteenth century steadily eroded the superstitions that lay in the substratum of intelligent minds.

Third among the literary types that preceded science fiction was the fantasy. In the Renaissance even the most highly cultivated minds could appreciate fiction that portrayed life in some delightful fairyland, in such a book as Sydney's Arcadia. But here again the growing dominance of utilitarian common sense scorned indulgence in dream worlds as a waste of time and a reprehensible avoidance of responsibility. By the nineteenth century, fantasy had been wholly relegated to juvenile literature, and even the satiric masterpieces of my first category, such as Don Quixote and Gulliver's Travels, were bowdlerized to serve as children's books. On the other hand, the expanding market for juvenile books led to an improvement in their quality, with the result that several authors of genius produced works in this category that are now recognized as masterpieces of fantasy meriting serious respect from adults--notably The Water Babies, Alice in Wonderland, and Phantastes. Thus the vital flame of fantasy was not merely kept alive but was enshrined in the very core of every literate mind, so that in mature life, though it might be ignored, it could not be extinguished.

Having thus listed the principal precursors of science fiction and noted that they were all reduced in prestige during the nineteenth century, it is necessary to consider the antagonist that had temporarily displaced them. All the dominant pressures upon the novel had combined to produce an earnest, somewhat monotonous type of domestic realism. Scientific thought was essentially in the fact-finding stage, laboriously observing phenomena and accumulating evidence as a basis for formulating strictly rational explanations of physical principles. The scientific mind of the era was inclined to regard imagination as a superficial but, distracting adornment and emotion as a menace to the cool functioning of

the human reason. Under this influence the novelists assumed that their duty was to record social and psychological details with scrupulous accuracy and austere detachment. Thackeray, Trollope, George Eliot, Henry James, all agreed in avoidance of exciting action or unfamiliar circumstances. The prevalent concept of realism reached its apogee in the confident assertions by W. D. Howells that all fiction was immoral unless it was confined to the everyday behavior and language of ordinary people. Writing in 1887, he thundered:

We must ask ourselves before we ask anything else, Is it true?--true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women? This truth, which necessarily includes the highest morality and the highest artistry--this truth given, the book cannot be wicked and cannot be weak; and without it all grace of style and feats of invention and cunning of construction are so many superfluities of naughtiness.... I can hardly conceive of a literary self-respect in these days compatible with the old trade of make-believe, with the production of the kind of fiction which is too much honored by classification with card-playing and horse-racing. But let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working them by springs and wires...and there can be no doubt of an unlimited future, not only of delightfulness but of usefulness, for it.

General adherence to this criterion imposed grave limitations upon prose fiction--limitations that isolated it from the main tradition of creative literature. One example must suffice. Mario Praz's challenging book on The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction has amply demonstrated how the domestic realism of the era obliterated the figure of the superior individual, the person whose virtues or vices raised him far enough above the average level to render him an object of envy or emulation or hatred or fear. This leveling of the characters of fiction to a commonplace mediocrity combined with the rejection of violent action and of exotic environment to make prose fiction once more ancillary to a non-artistic purpose. It was now providing specific details as equivalents for the documentary evidence of the social sciences. Carlyle's stigmatization of economics as "the dismal science" could well have been paralleled in the 1880's by terming fiction "the dismal art."

The whole realistic premise was profoundly contrary to the principle that the arts are not concerned with fact and logic but with imagination and feeling. Just as the neo-classical Age of Reason had locked poetry into a strait-jacket for more than a century, until the explosion of romanticism released the human spirit to its proper artistic freedom, so the new rationalism of the Age of Science was imprisoning fiction in solid walls of drab conformity, and a romantic revolt was once again required, if fiction were ever to reclaim its birthright of tragic dignity and comic absurdity and poetic beauty.

The new romantic novelists, who found their chief critical spokesman in Robert Louis Stevenson, were determined to employ themes and settings that could supply the excitement of danger, the glamour of unfamiliar surroundings, and the exaltation of heroic behavior. Many of them turned to the past as the most accessible source of these elements; but the historical novel had become so rigidly standardized in the mold set by Walter Scott that all the technical competence and scholarly research of Weyman, Quiller-Couch, and the others could not restore it to eminence. Even the historical novels of Conan Doyle, the best of the group, have not proved able to withstand the attrition of time.

Greater novelty, and therefore greater distinction, came to the writers whose experiences in remote regions of the world qualified them to write with authentic local color about primitive mores, lonely enterprises, and perilous physical conditions. In their various ways, Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, and Joseph Conrad all brilliantly profited by this opportunity. Two of them, however, proved to have associated themselves with themes that the rapid tempo of social change has rendered not only obsolete but unpopular. The concept of imperialism, which sixty years ago connoted unselfish nobility and picturesque audacity, has now degenerated into a dirty word, and the stories of Kipling and Haggard are irremediably tarnished thereby.

More lasting success came to Conan Doyle when he turned away from historical romances to create his great detective. Here all the romantic essentials were present--suspense, danger, and a hero of supreme ability--but located in a modern urban environment and embellished with an aura of intellectual acumen. The author, as a physician, had been trained in a scientific discipline, and Sherlock Holmes employed the scientist's methods in solving his problems. Indeed, criminology itself was one of the newly emerging behavioral sciences. Hence the hero's essentially romantic exploits were rendered uniquely pleasurable to the ultra-rational new intelligentsia.

The quasi-scientific elements in the Sherlock Holmes cycle point the way by which the new romantic fiction achieved its most startling triumph. In an age when the mental attitudes of science had vitiated the traditional resources of romance, the alternative was to exploit the romantic potentialities of science itself. It was in 1894 that Kipling wrote his cogent poem, "The King":

"Romance!" the season-tickets mourn,  
 "He never ran to catch his train,  
 But passed with coach and guard and horn--  
 And left the local--late again!"  
 Confound Romance!... And all unseen  
 Romance brought up the nine-fifteen.

His hand was on the lever laid,  
 His oil-can soothed the worrying cranks,  
 His whistle waked the snowbound grade,  
 His fog-horn cut the reeking Banks;  
 By dock and deep and mine and mill  
 The Boy-god reckless laboured still.



It was not only, however, that applied science was providing a dizzying succession of new inventions that changed the whole pattern of human life. At the same time the pure sciences were emerging from the plodding thoroughness of empirical research to the bold flights of speculative theory. Relativity and the quantum hypothesis and atomic energy were lurking just around the corner, ready to nullify the supposedly immutable laws of nature that had reigned unchallenged since Copernicus and Newton.

H. G. Wells chanced to be the person equipped with exactly the right qualities for recognizing the opportunity. With a respectable education in biology and physics he combined a journalist's agile intelligence and lively curiosity and an impudent disregard for established tradition. He seized upon the naive tale of adventure for boys, which had brought renown to Jules Verne, and transformed it into something new and astonishingly subtle. On the one hand, he retained a firm affiliation with the realistic fiction that was currently predominant. The compelling plausibility of The Time Machine, the weird intensity of The Invisible Man, the cataclysmal terror of The War of the Worlds, arise from their being liberally interspersed with scenes of everyday English life in the current year. Into this texture of domestic realism he interwove sturdy threads from all the earlier kinds of imaginative narrative that are now recognized as antecedents of science fiction; but he handled these potentially unconvincing ingredients so expertly that they merged into the pattern without incongruity.

The element of horror and dread was just as effectual as in a Gothic romance, but no skeptical reader could accuse the author of trading on the supernatural, since all the future developments that he described were consistent with the scientists' ever-accelerating control of the forces of nature. Similarly, even the earliest of Wells's novels contain perceptible implications of social criticism or utopianism, but the reader is seldom aware of any overt propagandizing. Rather, any suggestions of sneers at contemporary life or proposals for alternative forms of society seem to be latent in the narrative itself, and the story gives no impression of having been manipulated to serve as a vehicle for indoctrination. Hence each story belongs indubitably to the category of prose fiction, and not to that of allegory or satire.

Perhaps, however, it is the relationship of science fiction with pure fantasy that offers the most suggestive clues to its artistic status. Without drawing any serious inferences from the fact that Kingsley was an amateur biologist and Lewis Carroll a professional mathematician, one may nevertheless point out a significant relationship between science fiction and Victorian children's literature. The Water Babies and Alice in Wonderland are both imaginary voyages to realms where ordinary experience is distorted but not negated. One of them is on the same theme as Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea; the other, on that of A Journey to the Center of the Earth. The immense enthusiasm for such books a century ago arose from their being the only current literature that gave untrammelled and indeed exuberant freedom to the imagination. All the work-a-day shackles of common sense and practical utility were joyously flouted, and staid mid-Victorian citizens reveled in the temporary lib-

eration, while pretending that they were merely reading harmless fairy tales to their children. In the twentieth century, however, the literary respect for books of this type arises from their being essentially dream-narratives, and therefore richly susceptible to symbolic interpretation. When science fiction appeared upon the scene, it too partook of this dream (or often nightmare) quality of unearthly vividness and elusively distorted logic. At the time when Wells began to write, he could not have been aware that the psychoanalysis and the anthropologists were on the eve of launching a revolutionary thesis that within a generation totally overturned the concept of realism. The essential truth of human nature (and, consequently, of literary representation) ceased to depend upon external, material appearances, but was to be sought through dreams, wishes, irrational fears. And the most potent literary correlatives were primitive fairy tales and symbolic dreams--all the stuff that had been contemptuously lumped in the category of fantasy. Science fiction amply provided these fairy-tale elements, with the wizard disguised in the white jacket of a laboratory researcher and the ferocious giants and conniving dwarfs metamorphosed into Martians or into the Morlocks of the eight-thousandth century. Jack's beanstalk reappeared as the space-capsule bearing the first men to the moon; the spell put upon the sleeping beauty or upon Rip van Winkle was now supplied by the whirring gears of the Time Machine.

In this transformation the romantic hero, of course, regained his hereditary stature. No longer a brawny warrior or a captivating seducer of maidens, he was now an austere intellectual, but still irresistible through his mastery of secret physical processes. That he was sinister as often as beneficent, a Doctor Moreau as well as a Professor Redwood, was in itself a revival of the villain-hero role of Faust or Manfred or Milton's Satan himself. Stevenson, the arch-begetter of the new romanticism, had already symbolised the dichotomy in his nearest approach to science fiction, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

The kinship of the new science fiction with the other sub-types in the romantic revival was further demonstrated when several of the most skillful practitioners in those areas successfully invaded this one. Kipling's "With the Night Mail" and "As Easy as A.B.C." or Doyle's Lost World and Poison Belt challenge comparison with the best works of Wells.

As a solution, then, to the problem of evaluating science fiction on strictly aesthetic grounds, I suggest that the only criterion can be the extent to which any given specimen lives up to the fulfilment of these multiple roles. If the originality of its scientific hypothesis and the credibility of its data can be combined with realism in the scenes of contemporary life, a background of mature social consciousness in the utopian or satiric implications, and rich symbolic potential in the fantasy, then it can honestly lay claim to a permanent niche in literature.

## CURRENT BOOKS: NOTES AND REVIEWS: THE PASSING OF UTOPIA

Chad Walsh. From Utopia to Nightmare. New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962. 191 pp. \$4.00.

Based in part upon the annual, invitational Kellogg Lectures which Walsh gave a few years ago at the Episcopal Theological School at Cambridge, Massachusetts, his From Utopia to Nightmare attempts "by examining the decline of one sort of book and the rise of its apparent opposite to learn something about the condition of modern man and his society." In carrying out this intention, Walsh, with keener insight than most recent writers, illustrates how relevant a criterion the utopian-dustopian genre (and by implication science-fiction in general) is as a measure of the intellectual milieus of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Beyond its own provocative speculations, this is the chief value of his study.

As might be expected from his original audience and his other writings, his discussion is permeated with references to religious thinking; indeed, he compares both the utopian dreamers and the dystopians to the Old Testament prophets especially. Yet because "utopia is likely to be more humanistic than theocentric," though not necessarily "godless," From Utopia to Nightmare documents not only the passing of utopia but also of humanism before the diverse forces of the twentieth century. Although his final assertion pleads that we not let the utopian dream die, "because something profoundly human and perhaps profoundly Christian dies with it," his basic position is more accurately stated early: "Theoretically, the loss of utopian hopes could mean simply that man is abandoning his humanistic delusions and returning to Christian realism. But it can equally well mean that a mood of total pessimism, as unreasoned as the earlier utopian hopes, is engulfing our minds and our spirits."

In his analysis, Walsh keeps "strictly to the mainstream--utopias that imply not a snug retreat from the bustling world but conscious planning to reshape that world." Indeed, he asserts, as he traces the dream from Plato through More to Bellamy and Wells, planning is the key to utopia.

But first, in order to plan, western man has had to make certain basic assumptions. "Man is basically good . . . Man is exceedingly plastic. His 'nature' is a fiction . . . There is no need for a dichotomy between the happiness of the individual and that of society. . . . Man is a rational being and can become more so . . . The future holds a finite number of possibilities, which can be sufficiently foreseen for practical purposes . . . The purpose of utopia is man's earthly welfare . . . People don't get tired of happiness . . . Rulers can be found who will rule justly, or men can be picked and trained so that they will rule justly . . . Utopia is not opposed to freedom." (pp. 70-72)

All of these assumptions have been severely questioned by the events and thought of the twentieth century. Most provocative, perhaps, in Walsh's analysis of the downfall of the dream under the impact of the "nightmare chaos" is not so much his discussion of political events or Freudian psychology but rather of Neo-Orthodoxy.

There can be no doubt that this is one of the most significant books making use of science-fiction materials. Nevertheless, even while realizing that its intention is not with the genre per se and knowing that it must be aimed at the general reader as well as the scholar, one does regret Walsh's relying so heavily upon the traditional examples. Here are Bellamy and Wells; here are Huxley and Orwell -- given more attention than any other works, except perhaps for Zamiatin's We and Forster's The Machine Stops. Moreover, Ray Bradbury's works, such as Fahrenheit 451, are not mentioned.

Yet Walsh achieves his intention; he draws significant notice to science-fiction; undoubtedly he helps make possible the longer, more definitive study so badly needed.

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In March came news of the publication of the Eleven Year Cumulative Index to Galaxy Magazine (October 1950--December 1961). It has been done by author and by title. The price is \$1.00. Those interested in obtaining a copy should write to:

David F. Nolan  
4007 Dresden Street  
Kensington, Maryland

Available as of May 31, 1963, will be Sam Moskowitz's Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science-Fiction, published by World Publishing Company at \$6.00.

The table of contents is as follows:

- "Introduction
- 1. Cyrano de Bergerac: Swordsman of Space
- 2. The Sons of Frankenstein
- 3. The Prophetic Edgar Allan Poe
- 4. The Fabulous Fantast - Fitz-James O'Brien
- 5. Around the World with Jules Verne
- 6. The Real Earth Satellite Story
- 7. Ghosts of Prophecies Past, or, Frank Reade, Jr., and "Forgotten Chapters in American History"
- 8. The Wonders of H. G. Wells
- 9. The World, the Devil, and M. P. Shiel
- 10. Arthur Conan Doyle: A Study in Science Fiction

11. To Barsoom and Back with Edgar Rice Burroughs
12. The Marvelous A. Merritt
13. Karel Capek: The Man Who Invented Robots
14. Hugo Gernsback: "Father of Science Fiction"
15. The Lore of H. P. Lovecraft
16. Olaf Stapledon: Cosmic Philosopher
17. Space Opus: Philip Wylie
18. Dawn of Fame: The Career of Stanley G. Weinbaum
19. How Science Fiction Got Its Name
20. The Future in Present Tense"

As many of you know, Sam is the foremost of the popular critics-scholars of science-fiction. A bibliophile, he has a collection that probably cannot be matched by any university library except Harvard's. He has been an editor, most recently of Science Fiction and an anthology, Editor's Choice in Science-Fiction (New York: McBride, 1954).

T. D. C.

SCIENCE FICTION AS CULTURAL PHENOMENON: A RE-EVALUATION<sup>1</sup>

Mark R. Hillegas

For more than a decade now science fiction has offered an almost irresistible attraction to those who enjoy using the method of content analysis to determine what are the values and attitudes for which popular literature is a vehicle.<sup>2</sup> But unfortunately for the analysts, science fiction is a very large domain (Harvard's Clarkson Collection contains more than 2000 paperback books plus every issue of some one hundred magazines), and so far no one has had the energy to do more than sample here and there. Even so, the analysts have been fairly successful in delineating the contours of science fiction as a cultural manifestation, and this has been possible because science fiction apparently is written and read by people who share a somewhat similar background of education and interests.<sup>3</sup> In general the analysts have come to the sensible conclusion that science fiction is an expression of two common elements in Western culture.

The first element is the Baconian faith that by the systematic investigation of nature man can master the secrets of this mysterious universe and in so doing improve the human condition. Such faith in the power of science has clearly been implicit in a great deal of science fiction, especially in the thirties, and sometimes it is directly stated, as recently, for example, as in Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953). In this novel, the Overlords, a manifest symbol of science, invade our earth just in time to prevent men from turning their world into a radioactive wasteland and, by introducing reason and the scientific method into human activities, transform earth into a technological utopia where each individual can develop his potentialities to the fullest. As a carrier for the Baconian faith, science fiction is almost the exercise of a new religion, in which the scientist is priest and the scientific method creed.

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1. Professor Hillegas' paper was presented as part of a trio of papers under the topic, "The Cowboy, The Detective, and the Spaceman," at the ASA general meeting at MLA, Washington, D. C., in December, 1962.
  2. Among numerous articles which analyze science fiction in this way, these are perhaps the most important: S. E. Finer, "A Profile of Science Fiction," Sociological Review, N.S. II (December, 1954), 239-255; S. Mendel and P. Fingesten, "The Myth of Science Fiction," Saturday Review, XXXVIII (August 27, 1955), 7-8, 24-28; W. Hirsch, "Image of the Scientist in Science Fiction: A Content Analysis," American Journal of Sociology, LXIII (March, 1958), 506-512; R. H. West, "Science Fiction and Its Ideas," Georgia Review, XV (Fall, 1961), 276-286.
  3. See Finer, "A Profile of Science Fiction."

The second element common to science fiction as a cultural manifestation is the belief that the universe is a machine, indifferent to man and lacking a divine plan or purpose. This belief darkens the following passage from Algis Budrys' Rogue Moon (1960):

Death is in the nature of the universe, Barker. Death is only the operation of a mechanism. All the universe has been running down from the moment of its creation. Did you expect a machine to care what it acted upon?

And yet, as Robert West points out in a recent article in The Georgia Review, there is, in most science fiction, no failure of nerve in facing the cold infinities lying between the stars.<sup>4</sup> Science fiction holds that man, with the aid of science, is the measure of the universe--at least while he is alive. And so the analysts can also tell us that science fiction is the expression of what is a new myth, the embodiment of a uniquely modern vision of man and the cosmos.

But there is nothing surprising in the above analyses; for the analysts have done little more than point out that science fiction, as a kind of popular literature, is a vehicle for ideas about science and man's relationship to the universe which are generally widespread in the culture, something one might possibly surmise without having read any science fiction. If there is anything really unexpected in these analyses, it is the evidence as to the great vitality of these ideas, a vitality which the commentators have not so much directly described as indirectly suggested by the attention they have thought it worthwhile to give to science fiction. Yet even after this qualification is made, one has only said that science fiction presents a remarkably accurate index to certain elements in our culture, elements which are not altogether hard to detect in numerous other manifestations. All of this serves to suggest that we cannot expect to learn much more about science fiction by looking at it from the outside; and therefore it seems reasonable to turn to more humanistic methods in our attempt to understand this phenomenon. Here, I think, the fact that science fiction is a kind of popular literature (and hence may help to shape the attitudes and values of a great number of people) determines the scope and direction of our investigation. Specifically, we are forced to find answers to two questions. First, is science fiction a significant instrument for social criticism and comment on human life? Second, if it is such an instrument, how does it function?

The answer to the first question is that since World War II many science-fiction writers have turned to examining the whole relationship of human life to scientific and technological progress, have begun to deal with problems of human employment and activity, of freedom and social justice in a world dominated by machines, problems of ethics in an age of a new science of man, problems of the very survival of a species which seems to have outrun its intelligence. And so there has

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4. See "Science Fiction and Its Ideas."

appeared a great flood of science-fiction novels and stories, critical not only of the impact of science and technology on human life but critical of man and society, works whose criticism would never pass, as Oscar Shaftel has pointed out, "the official or unofficial censorship that has fallen upon most mass media of communication."<sup>5</sup> And in case we doubt our own interpretation, there is the supporting opinion of "mainstream" literary critics like Kingsley Amis and C. S. Lewis, who testify to the actuality of this revolution in science fiction."<sup>6</sup>

As for the second question -- how science fiction functions as social criticism -- a partial answer has already been given, most notably in Amis's New Maps of Hell (1960), a work largely devoted to showing how satiric and inverted utopias written by professional science-fiction writers have been used for what Amis terms "diagnosis and warning."<sup>7</sup> But much more remains to be discovered as to how science fiction provides an instrument for criticism of human life. An effective way, I think, to conduct an investigation of this problem would be to apply the concept that science fiction is not one single type or form of fiction but instead a collection of many genres. Looked at this way, science fiction would be found, I think, to contain certain genres which have a potentiality for criticism which is uniquely a function of the particular genre. Three genres stand out in this respect: the dystopia, the post-catastrophe novel or story, and space fiction. Before going on to discuss these three genres, it is important to make the qualification here that each may have elements from the other two. Space travel is frequently a part of the dystopia and sometimes of the post-catastrophe novel or story; dystopian elements are common in novels and stories concerned with other worlds; and the threat of world holocaust can hang over other worlds as well as this earth.

The first genre, the dystopia, extrapolates "existing tendencies" in our world today to warn us what the future may be like. A dystopia can be anywhere on a spectrum whose two ends are the nightmare and the satire, and, of course, it is a manifestation in popular literature of a tradition which stretches at least as far back as the eighteenth century and Gulliver's Travels. As a genre in science fiction, it lends itself especially to the kind of criticism which requires the preface, "If this

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5. Shaftel, "The Social Content of Science Fiction," Science and Society, XVII (Spring, 1953), 97-118.
  6. Amis, New Maps of Hell (New York, 1960), 87-133; Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism (Cambridge, 1961), 108-109. Also, see Chad Walsh, From Utopia to Nightmare (New York, 1962).
  7. In addition to Amis's book (cited in preceding note), the function of post-war science fiction as social criticism is also pointed out in several articles, such as Finer, "A Profile of Science Fiction"; Shaftel, "The Social Content of Science Fiction"; and M. R. Hillegas, "Dystopian Science Fiction: New Index to the Human Situation," New Mexico Quarterly, XXXI (Autumn, 1961), 238-249.



goes on...." Among recent dystopias which have made significant comment and attained the rank at least of minor literature are Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s, Player Piano (1952), which brilliantly imagines an America of the near future in which automated production has replaced the average worker and the only people who have work worth doing are managers and engineers; Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth's The Space Merchants (1953), which extrapolates a plundered and polluted world run tyrannically by ad men and business executives and which warns against the possibility of using the discoveries of the behavioral sciences to manipulate people without their knowledge or consent; and Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 (1954), which warns of a book-burning society in which wall television and hearing-aid radios enslave men's minds.

The second genre, which is like the first in being concerned with the future, is the post-catastrophe novel or story -- that is, fiction which describes the collapse of civilization after a world disaster, usually a nuclear war. Relying heavily on the effect of shock, this genre is able to say things about human nature and human civilization which cannot be effectively said in any other way. The genre has achieved significance at the hands of science-fiction writers in two very good recent novels, John Wyndham's Re-Birth (1953) and Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s, A Canticle for Leibowitz (1959), both of which find men, after the great atomic disaster, stumbling back to their previous level of civilization and another catastrophe.

The third genre is space fiction,<sup>8</sup> the novel or story set on another world. Let us turn to this genre now and study it in some detail, for space fiction, I believe, illustrates in its purest form the way a science-fiction genre can function as an instrument of criticism.

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8. I make a distinction between cosmic voyage and space fiction. The cosmic voyage (a term used first by Professor Marjorie Nicolson) is a form of space fiction which describes an imaginary journey to another world; that is to say, the voyage itself is given considerable emphasis, sometimes as much as is the description of the strange new world. The cosmic voyage was the dominant form of space fiction from the seventeenth century and works like Kepler's Somnium, Godwin's Man in the Moone, and Cyrano de Bergerac's Voyages to the Sun and Moon to the nineteen thirties and Lewis's Out of the Silent Planet, Lewis's work being the last major example of this form. In the thirties, however, the pulp magazines created a new kind of space fiction in which very little emphasis is given to the voyage, a kind of space fiction which usually, unless concerned with some aspect of the journey--for example, human reaction to the several generations of time required to reach the stars--has been able to presuppose the voyage and all its conventions. This kind of space fiction, with us ever since the thirties, starts its adventures in space or on another world, sometimes as simply and matter-of-factly as in this opening sentence from Robert Heinlein's "The Black Pits of Luna": The morning after we got the Moon, we went over to Rutherford."

The first important point to establish is that the plausible other world of twentieth-century space fiction is a quite different instrument of social criticism from the imagined world of the utopia. Primarily the capacity of modern space fiction to criticize rests on what an English sociologist, in characterizing all forms of science fiction, has called "a new basis of credibility": that is, a suspension of disbelief eased by the popular faith that almost everything is ultimately possible to modern science and technology.<sup>9</sup> Such credibility seldom exists in the utopia, which is marked by a quality which Richard Gerber has termed "ironical realism."<sup>10</sup> "In utopian writing," Gerber explains, "there is always a double level, the implication being: 'Here in this really existing utopia things are like this; they could also be like this in our known reality, but of course they are not, and perhaps, after all, they could not really be so, for we know, don't we, that this utopia does not really exist.'" In space fiction, on the other hand, such a double level does not exist, and the author imagines a distant world which is intended to be taken much more seriously as real than the imagined world in any utopia. It is a world eminently plausible in terms of modern scientific knowledge, particularly biology and the theory of evolution, a world which is inhabited by alien forms of life, with other customs and ways of living. This plausible other world is, naturally enough, the chief instrument for social criticism in space fiction and may function as such through several distinct techniques.

One technique is to send a traveler to live for awhile on the plausible other world; and, in what the traveler sees and experiences -- the differences can be at heart distortions, inversions, and exaggerations of characteristics of our world -- the reader gains new understanding of life on our world. By means of the comparisons and contrasts offered by the new world, the reader, through the eyes of the traveler, is able to look at earthly life from a distance, and what the reader learns is rendered especially accessible because of the dissociation with which the reader views the phenomenon of the new world. On a grander scale, such a voyage is like an account of travel to other lands on this earth, except that the author has almost limitless possibilities for rearranging the order of time and space.

The two greatest examples in the twentieth century of the use in this fashion of plausible other worlds are H. G. Wells's The First Men in the Moon (1901) and C. S. Lewis's Out of the Silent Planet (1938). Wells brilliantly creates the gigantic anthill of the moon's interior to present a paradox still unresolved in the twentieth century: how, in an age of science and technology, can the world achieve economic, social, political stability and efficiency and, at the same time, not dehumanize the individual by completely controlling him? Lewis transcends the familiar conventions of the Martian romance to look at human life through the eyes of the Oyarsa and the three unfallen species of Malacandra, as Mars is

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9. Finer, "A Profile of Science Fiction," p. 244.

10. Gerber, Utopian Fantasy (London, 1955), 89-104.

called in *Old Solar*. But these two works, as excellent as they are, are really outside of our present discussion, which is restricted to space fiction written since the war by professional science-fiction writers. The same technique, however, is used by professional science-fiction writers, a good example being the first part of James Blish's A Case of Conscience (1958).

A Case of Conscience represents the blending of genres of which we spoke earlier. The first part of the novel takes place on a distant world, Lithia (made real by carefully worked out ecological details) and so is space fiction. The second part is set on earth and is a nightmare utopia; but the novel is first of all a representative of space fiction since the action in the second part is a direct consequence of what exists and takes place on Lithia. The Lithians, a twelve-foot-tall reptilian people, know no God yet live and think righteously because to do so is reasonable, efficient, and natural. Without constraint or guidance, without laws of any kind, they follow an ethical code equivalent to the highest ideals evolved on earth. The question is whether Lithia is an unfallen world (like Lewis's *Malacandra*), or whether it is, as the central character, the Jesuit biologist, Father Ruiz-Sanchez, reluctantly concludes, a "planet and a people propped up by the Ultimate Enemy" to demonstrate once and for all that God need not exist. In either case, the chief vehicle for criticism is the contrast between men, with their built-in imperfections -- original sin, if you wish -- and the seemingly unfallen Lithians. This criticism of human nature by presenting its antithesis becomes almost unbearable in the second part, the inverted utopia, when we see men, riotous and neurotic, still living in underground shelters some time after a threat of atomic war has been averted.

Much more commonly, though, the plausible other world of space fiction is used in another way for social criticism -- that is, the focus is not so much on what a traveler sees on another world as on the contact between two species, the Earthlings and the aliens. Very often men exploit or corrupt the species or civilization with which they come in contact, Malcolm Jameson's *"Lilies of Life"* (Astounding Science Fiction, 1945), for example, speaks cogently about the relationship between religion and colonialism when it shows men of earth converting to Christianity the natives of Venus so that they will be useful, cooperative workers in the planet's uranium mines. Poul Anderson's *"The Helping Hand"* (Astounding Science Fiction, 1950) shows a world accepting technological aid from earth and thereby destroying its own unique potentiality for growth, for with the technological aid come the worst features of earthly civilization. But probably the best example of this kind of space fiction is Bradbury's The Martian Chronicles (1950). This collection of stories -- incidents in a great migration from earth to Mars, where an old, dying race is killed off by a terrestrial disease -- presents the hauntingly pathetic contrast between the civilization of the departed Martians -- "a graceful, beautiful, philosophical people" who blended art into their living and never let science get out of hand -- with the immature, materialistic, unstable civilization which is being transferred to Mars. Because it is set on another world, we are able to achieve sufficient detachment to see with

understanding what happens as the men of earth energetically set about defacing the ancient and beautiful world, littering the proud canals with tin cans, the gray sea bottoms with dirty newspapers, the deserted cities with banana peels and picnic papers; and building prefabricated hot-dog stands at the crossroads of fifty-centuries-old highways -- in short, demonstrating their total insensitivity to any values beyond the crudely materialistic. The book is also an instance of the merging of genres, of which we have spoken. In this case the apocalyptic element is joined to space fiction, for after awhile nuclear war breaks out on earth and the colonists return to their homelands in time for the final catastrophe.

Besides the two ways already discussed of using plausible other worlds to criticize human life, there are other possibilities in space fiction. One of these is the theme of the invasion of earth by superior creatures from another world. Most often, of course, this theme has been turned merely to the uses of terror, bringing forth an unending series of alien menaces in twentieth-century space fiction. But occasionally the theme has been used for criticism of human life, just as it was in the first important examples of the theme, Kurd Lasswitz's Auf Zwei Planeten (1897) and Wells's The War of the Worlds (1898). In this relatively small category there are several recent novels and stories about aliens who come to bring order out of earthly chaos -- for example, the Overlords in Childhood's End. Finally one ought to add that space fiction can criticize without using a plausible inhabited world at all. Vonnegut's The Sirens of Titan (1961) turns space adventure to farce in order to smother in Gargantuan laughter the absurdities of American civilization and the human follies which support these absurdities. And Algis Budrys' Rogue Moon sends men to map a mysterious and hostile natural formation on the moon -- a kind of "Alice in Wonderland with teeth" -- in order to question the meaning of the human adventure in a universe without mind or purpose. But The Sirens of Titan and Rogue Moon are very much the exception in their methods of criticism.

The preceding discussion is sufficient, I think, to suggest the rich potentiality of space fiction for social criticism and comment. The same richness of potentiality also characterizes the other two genres which I have briefly discussed, and, to a lesser extent, still other genres which I have not discussed, such as novels and stories concerned with adventures in time, marvelous inventions, journeys into the hollow earth, and so forth. Science fiction demands further study, but one needs to resist the temptation to approach it in the wrong way -- particularly one needs to resist the temptation to study it as myth.

In a broad sense, of course, science fiction is myth embodying the familiar ideas we mentioned at the beginning of our discussion -- that is, the faith that man, using science and the scientific method, is the master of the mindless universe in which he finds himself. But this information is ultimately unenlightening, while further generalization about science fiction as myth is prevented by the very diversity of the novels and stories in the different genres of science fiction. Besides, the mythic constituent is not what is important about science fiction.

What is really important about science fiction is that in its various genres it provides an extraordinarily flexible instrument for social criticism, that it is particularly able to deal with problems of life in a new age of science and technology, and that at the same time it is able to reach, because it is a kind of popular literature, a much larger audience than does most mainstream literature. In other words, science fiction has a significance in itself which far transcends its importance as an index to our culture. It is an interesting, vital phenomenon whose characteristics ought to dictate the nature of any investigation of it. There is a need to continue where Amis's New Maps of Hell has left off and to undertake a truly comprehensive survey of science fiction as social criticism.

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